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**I**S it in the interest of history in schools that a fuller definition of the history requirement be made by the American Historical Association showing the especial points to be emphasized and those to be more lightly treated?

## A DISCUSSION

BY  
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## Topic for consideration:

*"IS it in the interest of history in schools that a fuller definition of the history requirement be made by the American Historical Association, showing the especial points to be emphasized and those to be more lightly treated?"*

Report of the  
Committee  
of Seven

At the risk of seeming ultra conservative, I venture to answer this question in the negative. Previous to 1899 there was no approach to uniformity in the history courses given in our secondary schools. Furthermore, the schools that gave a four years' course in history were exceedingly few. But in that year the Committee of Seven made its famous report, and schools at once began to model their history courses after the committee's scheme. The result is that now, sixteen years later, there is a fair degree of uniformity in the history work of the secondary schools of the United States, and a four years' course is the rule rather than the exception. In 1911, the Commit-

The  
Committee  
of Five

tee of Five made the tentative suggestion that English and mediaeval European history be combined in the second year with emphasis on English history, and that the third year be devoted to modern history. Little attention has been paid to this suggestion, and thus today the four-year history courses in our secondary schools are based on the recommendations of the Committee of Seven.

Are New  
Recommendations  
Advisable?

Now, why should a new committee be appointed to send out to the history teachers of the nation a new recommendation relative to the content of history courses? Such a recommendation would not make for greater uniformity. On the other hand it would tend to destroy such uniformity as now exists; for some schools would

follow the new recommendation, while others would abide by the old plan. The desire for a new committee and a new report grows out of dissatisfaction with certain features of the course as mapped out by the Committee of Seven. The changes advocated may be summed up in three statements:

**The Changes Proposed** 1. That the course in history should cover three instead of four years, English history as a separate course being discontinued.

2. That the point of division between the first and the second year's work be moved along from the year 814 to 1600 or 1700 A. D.

3. That American colonial history be disposed of during the second year as a part of European history, leaving the third year for American history and government since 1760.

**English History Losing Ground** It is true that English history as a separate course is losing ground; not because English history lacks inherent value, but because so many

other subjects—business courses, industrial courses, current English, current history, economics, etc.—have come into the curriculum to compete for the pupils' time. This competition is especially keen in the case of English history, because the majority of this wide range of electives are open, as in English history, only to third or fourth-year pupils. But there are still some of our pupils, especially in the large schools, who want English history. I can think of no good reason why they should not have it. Of course it cannot be made obligatory, but neither can ancient or European history. Any attempt on the part of history teachers to make any of the history courses, other than American history and government, obligatory, is certain to meet with failure, on account of the new courses that have been recently admitted and of others that are knocking for admission. If by surrendering English history we could have a three years' course, required of all for graduation, the proposition would seem more attractive; but to surrender it without any compensation, when some pupils want it, seems uncalled for.

**The Division  
Point Between  
First and  
Second Year's  
Work**

The one feature of the course outlined by the Committee of Seven which is meeting with the most persistent criticism in certain quarters is the division point—the year 814 A. D.—between the first and the second year's work. It is proposed to move this point of division to the middle of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century in order to gain more time for modern history. The proposition is so important, and to my mind so serious, that it should be considered with the utmost care and discussed with the utmost frankness. I admit the desirability of having more time for modern history, but considering the matter from all points of view, I prefer to retain the year 814 as the end of the first year's course.

**The Course in  
Ancient History  
Must Be Adapted  
to the Ninth  
Grader**

In the first place, I assume that the first year's work is to be taken by first-year, or ninth-grade, pupils. As I have already stated, I do not believe that ancient history or European history can ever be required for graduation—at least in our large city schools. These subjects must remain optional and must compete with other subjects. It would, therefore, be a serious thing for high school history not to begin with the ninth year. If left to the second year, after the interests of pupils have been established along other lines, the number of those electing history will be greatly diminished. The whole matter, therefore, reduces itself to the proposition of giving to pupils of the ninth grade a course in history from the earliest beginnings down to 1600 or 1700 A. D.

**Mental Limita-  
tions of the  
Ninth Grader**

I do not need to dwell here upon the capabilities of boys and girls of fourteen and fifteen years of age. They are enthusiastic, willing to work, eager to learn. But their mental horizon is very limited; their understanding of human affairs is confined almost within the bounds of their own meager experience; their power to think logically is just beginning to dawn; and their ability to

concentrate their minds upon any subject is so undeveloped that it is very difficult for them, by their own unaided efforts, to arrive at a clear understanding of the meaning of an ordinary paragraph in any of our text-books of history. The course as outlined by the Committee of Seven for the first year extends, in point of time, from the earliest beginnings—about 5000 B. C.—to the year 814 A. D. To appreciate the passage of that immense stretch of time requires the maturity of an adult, the mental training of a university graduate, and the imagination of a poet. But something can be done with boys and girls of fourteen and fifteen if they are not required to hurry. By carefully selecting the parts that are to be emphasized and the parts that are to be more lightly treated, the ground to 814 A. D. can be covered in the first year with some degree of satisfaction. If, however, the whole mediaeval period of history were to be added to the year's work, I firmly believe that the result, from an educational point of view, would be disastrous,—disastrous because it would put so much into the course that the whole purpose of the year's work would be defeated.

The Danger  
of Attempting  
Too Much

I believe that we will all agree that our business is not so much to teach history as to educate boys and girls. We use history as a valuable instrument in the process. If we make the instrument too cumbersome, we fail. We can't teach a five-year-old boy to mow grass with a scythe. A first-year pupil, who should be driven over a course in history extending to the end of the mediaeval period, would emerge from the year's work with his head buzzing with vague notions. He would have gained no definite information as to the subject-matter thus bolted, would have acquired no vital interest in history, would have formed no careful habits of study. In fact, the year's work would not further the process of his education in the slightest degree, for the hop-skip-and-jump method of disposing of huge masses of material can result in nothing but foggy ideas and slovenly habits—and these have no educative value.

**As to the  
Selection of  
Material**

Those who advocate the inclusion of the mediaeval period in the first year's work expect to be able to cover the ground by eliminating many items which are now regarded as of some importance; and we hear a good many depreciatory remarks about burdening our pupils' minds with such matters of detail as the reign of Rameses III, the ambitions of Nebuchadnezzar or Cyrus the Great, the reforms of Solon, the conquests of Alexander, or the love affairs of Cleopatra or Henry VIII. Whatever one may think of this or that item as a topic appropriate for consideration in a secondary history course, the fact remains that Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, the various Greek cities, Macedonia, and Rome, each had a continuous story, which takes its place as a part of the larger story of the ancient world. Here are certain facts, certain events leading to certain results, certain theories put into practice, certain great movements, rivalries, alliances, tragedies, advances toward righteousness, all blending together into a wonderful story. Men dispute as to many of the details, but not as to the main drift of the story. Any course in ancient history that does not make clear, insist upon, and take time to develop this main drift cannot be very effective in furthering the process of education.

**Material Selected  
Must Make Clear  
the Main Drift  
of the Story**

The mind acquires power when by a determined effort it incorporates any logically arranged body of knowledge; but when it is merely exposed to a great mass of material and is then hurried on to another mass without time to analyze, to arrange, to compare, to meditate, it acquires no strength from the experience, for it simply refuses to act. If one is dissatisfied with the selection of material found in the various textbooks of ancient history, let him make his own selection; but let him remember that his selection must make clear the main drift of the story of the ancient world. That is independent of him and he cannot change it. Another thing which he must keep in mind is the immaturity of ninth-grade boys and girls. Still

another fact is that education is a slow and steady growth, and that there is no royal road to it. Time must be allowed for these young people not only to comprehend the passage of seventy centuries, which in itself is a stupendous conception, but also to learn many names and facts—for there will be many names and facts no matter what the selection of material may be—and to arrange them into a complete whole.

Reasons for Adding Mediaeval Period to First Year's Work      The proposition of adding the mediaeval period to the first year's work seems to be based upon two assumptions: first, that the ancient and mediaeval periods of history are of little, if of any importance, and are therefore to be disposed of as quickly and as painlessly as possible; and second, that modern history is *per se* both more interesting and more valuable than the story of the earlier periods. I do not wholly accept either of these assumptions. Since our business is to educate young boys and girls, we should teach no period of history simply to be rid of it, but should use each period as a valuable instrument in our work. That ancient or mediaeval history can thus be used, there can be no question. As far as the element of interest is concerned—and it is an element of tremendous importance—any phase of history is as interesting to a class as the teacher is able to make it. Some teachers can arouse more interest in the struggle between the Egyptians and the Hittites than others can arouse in the French Revolution or the American Civil War. Interest in historic events does not depend so much upon their location in point of time as upon how they are used to make great national or international crises, with their accompanying human emotions, sympathies, and passions, live again.

Danger of an Unscholarly Attitude      There can be no doubt that the history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in that they immediately precede and lead up directly to the present, possesses a certain kind of importance that no former period has. But I firmly believe that the pupil



who takes the two years' course with the year 814 as the dividing point will at the end of the course more deeply comprehend the modern period than the pupil who devotes his entire second year to the last two centuries after having skimmed lightly over the whole preceding stretch of centuries. The reason is that the one will come to a study of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with a fair understanding of the history of the preceding centuries, together with the mental power that comes from acquiring that understanding; while the other will come to the modern period with vague notions concerning earlier times and the unscholarly attitude which inevitably accompanies the acquisition of vague notions.

Bearing of Ancient History upon Present Day Problems	I am unwilling to admit that modern history is at every point more valuable to us than ancient or mediaeval history. Knowledge of the past may be said to be valuable in proportion as it helps us rightly to understand the present—although this of course is not the sole element of value. Ancient and mediaeval history abounds in lessons that greatly illuminate the problems of the present and of the recent past. The problem of political union or separation, as settled in different ways by the Greeks and by the Romans, with such far-reaching results, helps us to understand that same problem as applied to our own country. The controversy in Athens over the question of building a strong navy, the way it was decided, and the final outcome, would doubtless be of value to us in our present controversy over the same question. Rome's "Monroe Doctrine" over Sicily and later over the rest of the Mediterranean world, and its final results, might give us some hint as to the importance of our own Monroe Doctrine. If the American people had had the patience to learn what ancient and mediaeval history has to teach respecting slavery and its final disappearance, our great Civil War might have been avoided. Our colonial system is in large measure based upon that of Rome. Rome has much to teach us, too, respecting the struggle between the classes that
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enjoy special privileges and those that do not. I do not question that modern history has much light to throw upon the present day problems—and that is its unique advantage—, but the advice that comes to us from ancient and mediaeval times has one marked advantage over what comes to us from the last two centuries: it is final. It comes with a period, not with a question mark at the end of it; for sufficient time has elapsed to register the final results of politics, rivalries, social forces, and other elements that made up the life of those early times.

**Unique Advantage of Ancient and Mediaeval History** To my mind one of the most serious objections to carrying the first year's work beyond the year 814 is the fact that such a plan necessarily slights the history of Rome. The Roman Empire is the central point in the history of the world; for the attainments, the advances toward civilization, of all previous peoples, are appropriated by Rome and passed on to succeeding generations. From Rome as a starting-point, therefore, the history of the modern world begins, so that to the student of history all roads lead to Rome figuratively, as they once did actually. It follows that any course in European history that does not take time to impress upon the minds of the pupils the tremendous significance of Rome is fundamentally wrong.

**Objections to Slighting Roman History** The nature of the period immediately following the death of Charlemagne furnishes another objection to including it in the first year's work. Down to the fifth century the civilized world had for many generations lived a settled, comparatively peaceful life. Then come three centuries of confusion and disorder caused by the German and the Mohammedan invasions. In the eighth century the Franks under the Carolingians bring order out of chaos. A class of young people following the progress of events feel that with Charlemagne they have once more reached solid ground, for again there is unity and comparative

**Death of Charlemagne a Logical Dividing Line**



peace. Here it seems to me is the logical place to end the first year's work, for on beyond is another long period of confusion and disorder, unquestionably the most difficult period in the world's history to understand.

**The Real Purpose in Teaching History**

And now after all this argument relative to the subject-matter of the first and second-year courses in history, permit me to state that in my opinion the acquirement of any given subject-matter by the pupil is not the sole end or aim of the course. Whether pupils spend a half-year or an entire year on the modern period, or any other period of history, the information which they acquire will speedily be forgotten. So true is this that if we teach history solely for the purpose of making it stick in the memory of the pupil, we all fail. Our real purpose is to give our pupils a deeper sympathy for humanity, and a broader vision of life; to give them a surer grasp of present day social, economic, and political problems; to develop in them the power to search intelligently for the truth relative to delicate and complicated human affairs, and to be able to distinguish between truth and near-truth; and finally to help them acquire such moral strength as will come from contemplating the successes and failures of men in the past—for the causes of these successes drive home with unanswerable logic the truth of that great moral law that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." If our work is well done, these things will abide though the facts of history fade from the mind. Thus the proposition that ancient and mediaeval history be slighted in order to increase the time devoted to modern history on the theory that the facts of the more recent period are, *per se*, more useful to the student than those of former periods, is not valid, for the facts of any period, no matter how well learned, will soon be forgotten.

The suggestion that the colonial period of American history be taken care of as a part of the preceding course in modern history would doubtless meet with universal approval if modern history could be made a requirement for graduation. I do

not believe that this can be done, and therefore I cannot see how the proposition can be entertained.

No Radical  
Change in  
History Course  
Advisable

Finally, for the reasons which I have tried to make clear, I do not believe that any radical change in the history course as outlined by the Committee of Seven is advisable. Individual school systems should be encouraged to try such modifications of the course as seem wise to them. For example, I am strongly in favor of giving a year and a half to American history and government. Those who feel so inclined may profitably try the experiment of adding the mediaeval period to the first year's work, or of making any other change that appeals to them. But I feel that a report of a national committee as to a revised course would be of little value until such experiments have led to some conclusions that are fairly definite and rather widely accepted.

A More  
Important  
Problem

To my mind a far more important question than that of revising the course of study in history is the question of **how best to use the subject-matter contained in the course.** The question of what should be the content of each year's work, I feel has been answered satisfactorily by the Committee of Seven, but it seems to me the problem of **aims and methods** has not received sufficient attention. I believe, therefore, that the American Historical Association would render a useful service to the teaching of history in secondary schools if they should appoint a committee which, accepting the courses as outlined by the Committee of Seven, should make detailed suggestions as to the aims and purposes of each year's work, and as to the methods to be used to attain those ends. Many teachers still proceed upon the assumption that the only purpose of any given day's work is to see that their pupils absorb the facts recorded on certain pages of the text-book.

Beyond this, what should they do? There is no time to enter into a discussion of this question now, but a definite detailed answer to it by a committee in which all history teachers could have confidence would constitute a report of first importance.







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